

NCIA News



The newsletter for current trends and issues in Correctional Industries

Working on the Inside - Succeeding on the Outside

OVERCOMING



BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



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Fall 2005

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On the Cover: Overcoming Barriers To Employment
by Michelle W. Pierce, JD



By Frank Losco, Chief, Office of Public Affairs,
California Prison Industry Authority

The California Prison Industry Authority (PIA) is collaborating with the San Diego community to establish a "Community Reentry Project" that will assist PIA inmates and jail inmates in transitioning back into the local area.

PIA's partners in the project include the San Diego Sheriff's Department (SDSD), Mental Health Systems (MHS), the San Diego Workforce Partnership (who operates the One-stop Career Center funded by the Workforce Investment Act), employers, and community and faith-based organizations. The project, which is scheduled to roll out late this summer, establishes an employment-centered network of services that is facilitated by a team of transition coordinators.

MHS is the lead agency because they operate over 100 mental health and alcohol and drug treatment programs in more than 70 geographical locations within 11 counties throughout California and also in Baltimore. This experience uniquely qualifies MHS to serve as the lead agency.

The primary goal is to reduce recidivism by coordinating and enhancing services that are already

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We can measure outcomes such as recidivism, but it is more difficult to measure attitudes and motivation. We have been able to see the first steps of change manifest themselves in our inmates. When an individual begins to realize that he/she has a choice in his/her behavior and his/her life, and he/she can make that choice, we see the seeds of change taking root. He/she can choose to accept societal rewards and enter into new behaviors. This new citizen of our community will have a better cognitive process, and a new appreciation of the social contract that binds us all.

At A-Step, we attempt to re-chrome the individual by providing access to these programs. We hope to galvanize the inmate by providing a chance to work in our jail industry program, earn money, and develop a healthy work ethic. We promote team unity and assist the inmate in a conversion that will build a stronger, more productive community - both inside the correctional facility and in his/her own neighborhood.

We release inmates from county jails across the country on a daily basis with no one to pick them up, no new skills, no new attitudes, and without a dime in their pockets.

However, using an effective industry program bound together with other developmental programs, we can release individuals with new attitudes, money in their pockets, and the ability to make better choices for their new start. Money may not solve every problem, but it's not just the money, it's the new attitudes and behaviors that result in change that will allow for the optimism of an improved start.

Is this a worthwhile endeavor for our communities or should we just continue with business as usual? If we want to change the behavior of inmates, successfully transition them to the community, and give them life-skills, we must start from the beginning, the first day they enter our jails. Society demands that we do our jobs better and change non-productive inmates into productive members of our communities.

While the approach that we suggest will not work for every inmate, we know that it works for some. It takes vision and commitment from correctional administrators, staff, and the community. We need to look at this new approach. Times have changed and we must change as well. It can work if we want it to work. Why not give it a try? ■

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available in the San Diego community. By assisting parolees to obtain services immediately upon release from custody, they can avoid situations that foster re-offending. The project is built upon the "best practice" of beginning the development of a reentry pathway for the parolee prior to release.

The project will use a wrap-around case management model for client populations that need assistance with improving decision skills and are subject to "falling through the cracks" of the service delivery system. The wrap-around approach is client/family centered, strength-based, needs-driven, comprehensive, team-oriented, and requires individualized planning and services.

This reentry model will begin with an assessment for each client that is prepared as early as nine months prior to release. That assessment packet will be given to one of the Transitional Coordinators, who will then provide seamless wrap-around services by coordinating with community partners to maximize successful reentry for each client. Clients will have received valuable pre-release services from PIA, and will discharge with

assessment information.

MHS will provide coordination and provision of services and referrals to community-based organizations and faith-based organizations. MHS will also provide oversight and training of staff. The PIA and SDSO will provide in-custody training and job-readiness services and ensure program staff access to clients in custody. Parole and probation agencies will coordinate services with program staff to ensure mutual goals are met and program services do not overlap. Community-based organizations will provide alcohol, drug, mental health, housing, education and other support services to clients.

"There is a renewed focus in California on assisting inmates with the reentry process. I am enthused about the roll out of the Community Reentry Project in San Diego because it provides new opportunities for our inmates to succeed on the outside," said Matt Powers, PIA's General Manager. "The Prison Industry Authority plans to replicate this same model in other regions in California. This is really an investment in public safety, because employed parolees mean safer communities." ■



The Workman Fund is an established 501(c)(3) not-for-profit public foundation providing working capital and equipment/building financing for private-sector prison industries.

Since our incorporation in 1991, we have assisted new PSPI startups in California, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico and Utah.

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